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# BOZEMAN COMPANY GETS BACKING FOR WIND PROJECT

*By Associated Press*

Link

A Montana renewable energy company says it has the backing of 10 wind farm developers to pursue a sprawling power collection grid serving Montana, North Dakota and Alberta.

The announcement by Grasslands Renewable Energy of Bozeman came as the company received initial approval Friday for a reservoir project that would store excess power from the developers' prospective wind farms.

Grasslands president Carl Borgquist says wind-generated electricity would be used to pump water uphill to a 50-acre reservoir on Gordon Butte near Martinsdale. When the wind stops blowing, the water could be released to a lower reservoir — turning hydropower turbines to keep electricity flowing.

The preliminary permit from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission gives Grasslands a three-year licensing priority for its project.

As planning for the reservoirs advances, Borgquist said financial commitments from the wind developers, which he did not detail, would cover feasibility study costs on the company's related Wind Spirit transmission project.

"It's a big day for us," he said. "It's not (the money) we will need to push forward with development. But we hope to keep continuing to make steps forward."

The combined cost of the wind energy collector system and the pump-storage project was estimated at close to $2 billion — a steep price given that Grasslands and other renewable companies must compete with more traditional power sources such as natural gas.

The nation's electricity demand contracted during the recession, even as gas gained favor among many utilities. Prices for the fuel are low, while burning it produces fewer emissions than coal, the power industry's longtime mainstay.

Wind power has only a sliver of the electricity market, but demand has been rising sharply, due in part to climate change worries.

Montana has 376 megawatts of wind power online, with another 500 megawatts expected to be built over the next couple of years, said Tom Kaiserski with the Montana Department of Commerce.

Over the long-term, Kaiserski said the state could have 5,000 megawatts of wind power, equivalent to about 2,500 large turbines.

Most of the state's wind power likely will be exported to growing markets on the West Coast and in the desert Southwest.

Large transmission "trunk lines" to span those routes are in the planning stages.

Projects like Wind Spirit would link the large lines with isolated wind farms scattered across the Northern Plains. Northwestern Energy has a similar system planned, called the Montana Renewable Collector System.

Two of the largest trunk lines are being pursued by TransCanada — a 3,000-megawatt Montana-Nevada line and a 3,000-megawatt Wyoming-Nevada line.

TransCanada Project Manager John Dunn said collector systems like the one proposed by Grasslands would bridge the gap between the trunk lines and far-flung wind farms. He said Grasslands' pump storage reservoirs also could play a vital role.

"They basically help generators deliver a firmer, less-intermittent product to the market," Dun said. "That's a very valuable component of this renewable equation."

Power projects that could be wrapped into Wind Spirit include four wind farm sites in Montana, two in Alberta, one in North Dakota and three with undetermined locations, according to Grasslands spokeswoman Amanada Larrinaga.

Citing confidentiality agreements, Grasslands would not identify most of the developers involved. But a representative of one company, Windmaker Energy, issued a statement touting Grasslands' potential.

Windmaker managing partner Jeff Arcel said Wind Spirit would "allow wind developers from different geographic areas to work together in new ways to fully realize our potential.